

The Coalition for Sustainable Nutrition Security in India

Background: The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has been working in partnership with the Government of India (GOI) to improve the health and quality of life of the people of India for over 50 years. Food and nutrition security has been at the center of USAID's programming, which has included support for the Mid-Day Meals program and the Integrated Child Development Services program. USAID also contributed to India's Green Revolution, especially in supporting agricultural universities, irrigation systems and developing agricultural research capacity.

Responding to the Evidence: The NFHS-3 survey and other data raised considerable concern about continuing poor nutritional status for a large segment of the Indian population. In response, USAID sought to stimulate some new thinking and new approaches to this problem and co-sponsored a major consultation with the Indian Council of Medical Research and the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation from August 12-14, 2007. Over 100 professionals representing various perspectives on nutrition security participate in this consultation (called the National Nutrition Conclave) to consider a critical question: *A Nutrition Secure India: How do we get there?* The diverse group of participants included central and state Government officials, NGOs, civil society, corporate leaders, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, nutrition experts, activists and academics.

Following a creative, participatory process, the participants produced the Chennai Declaration, which was released on August 14, 2007. The Chennai Declaration calls for a "nutrition revolution" and a number of priority actions such as developing a comprehensive nutrition strategy for children under two, increased attention to urban nutrition, public-private partnerships and increased efforts in nutrition education.

Formation of the Coalition: The Book of Proceedings from the Conclave was presented to the Minister of Women and Child Development, GOI on October 3, 2007 in Delhi. At this event, Professor M S Swaminathan announced the formation of the Coalition for Sustainable Nutrition Security in India, a high level group of policy, program and political leaders, such as Government Ministers and senior representatives from the Planning Commission, media, NGOs, national and international development partners and the private sector. Professor Swaminathan requested USAID to support a Secretariat for the Coalition, which it provided through the Vistaar Project.

At its first meeting on November 6, 2007 the Steering Committee of this Coalition adopted a Terms of Reference and agreed to form four task forces to take a number of the recommendations from the Conclave and the Chennai Declaration forward.

The Leadership Agenda: Following its first meeting, the Coalition (with support from the Secretariat) assembled a wide range of national and international experts to prepare a Leadership Agenda for Action. This included three documents:

- Overcoming the Curse of Malnutrition in India
- The Ten Essential Interventions for Reducing Malnutrition in Infants and Young Children
- A Five Point Charter for Overcoming the Curse of Malnutrition

The Leadership Agenda is based on a careful literature review as well as an extensive programming experience. It recommends a number of priority actions such as the creation of coordinating structures at community, state and national level and integrating a focus on nutrition into major national programs and missions. On September 19, 2008 the Steering Committee held its second meeting to review and accept the Leadership Agenda for Action.

During the review meeting, a work-plan for the period October 2008 to June 2009 has been developed which includes:

- Completing a section of the Leadership Agenda on improving nutrition for women (especially adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers)
- Preparing and sharing a brief document on lessons learned from Indian states and other countries in reducing malnutrition
- Supporting consultations on priority topics such as the role of corporate responsibility in improving nutrition
- Establishing a small working group, which will further develop and share the action plans with appropriate national leaders (incorporating the results from the efforts listed above)